

HB5256 - CT Transit District Consolidation
Testimony of Jennifer Johnson, Westport, CT
March 7, 2022

Thank you for today's opportunity to speak on the subject of Transit District consolidation in Connecticut. My name is Jennifer Johnson, and I live in Westport, CT. My testimony today comes from insights gained from having served in various locally-elected and appointed capacities - including as a Westport Transit Director, as an Executive Board member of the former South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA); and from other work in the private and public sectors focused on regional and national real estate and land-use related matters.

It is imperative that this Committee move forward to adopt legislation that enables state transportation officials to consolidate the more than one dozen transit districts across our state. Having multiple districts operating in the same economically defined and relatively small geographic region results in a colossal waste of tax dollars. It is confusing to the public, creates inequalities between neighboring districts and stifles economic growth.

In many places, transit connections are so difficult to figure out that people are forced to take a car, find another job, or just give up going where they need or want to go. And if all this isn't bad enough, perpetuating a transit system that relies on a "family" of multiple transit districts and operators only serves to seriously disadvantage our state when we try to compete against other states for critically-needed infrastructure funding that is soon to be available with the recent passage of the Federal \$1.2 Trillion Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Act.

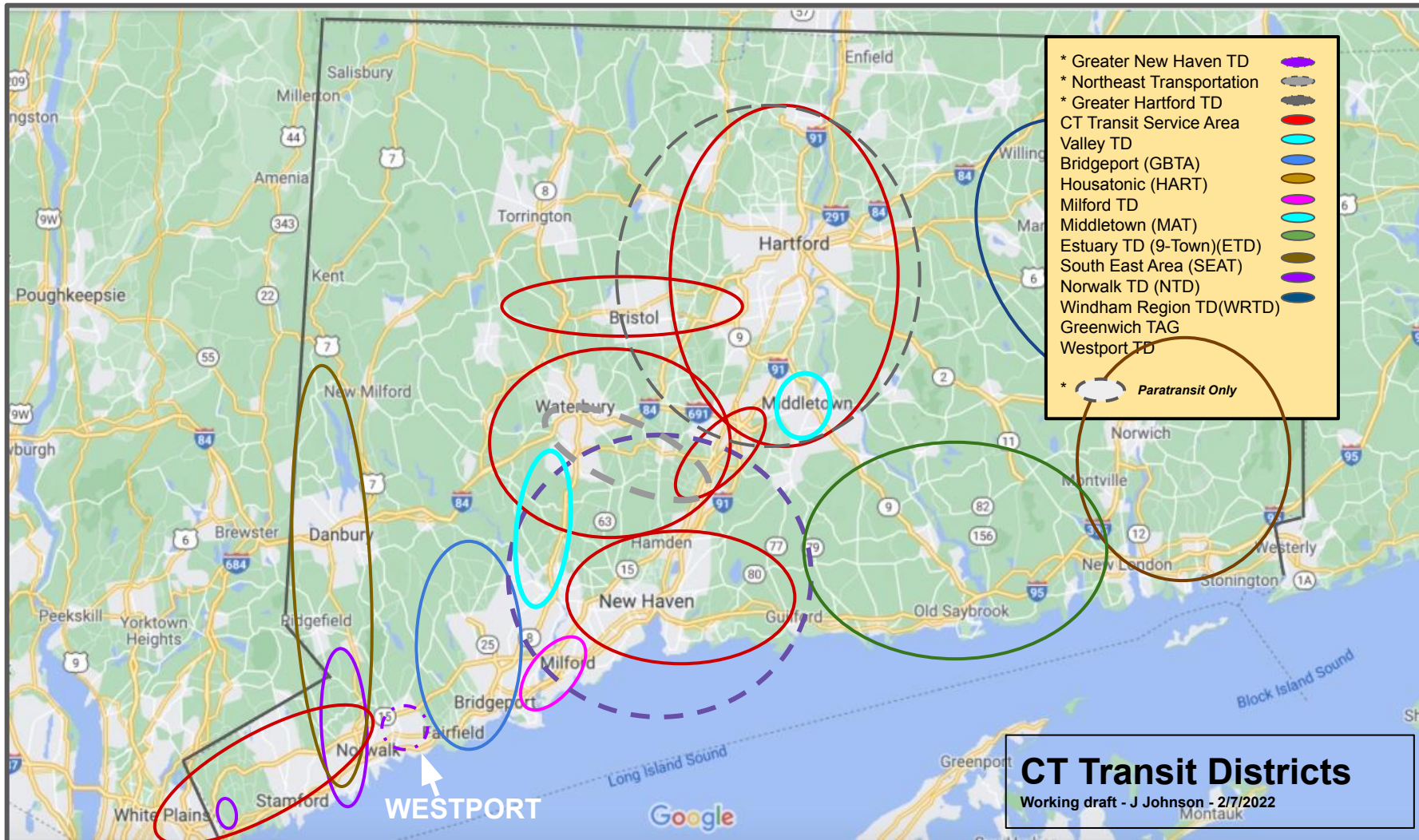
Take for example SWCT. Between Greenwich and New Haven there are seven transit districts and operators that operate within the same historic and economically critical transportation corridor. These include: Norwalk TD, Westport TD, HART TD, CT Transit, Milford TD, Greater Bridgeport TD and Greater New Haven TD. This means that if you live or work in SWCT and you want (or need) to take some form of transit or paratransit, you must find seven different websites and/or seven different mobile apps to sort out where and when a bus is coming. It also means that seven different operators are competing for the same state and federal dollars to run their individual systems, and those seven operators compete for the same dollars to fund capital projects. No matter how hard the state has tried over the decades, not one of these transit operators has the jurisdictional reach to coordinate operations, websites, capital funding, public outreach and implementation strategies across this important economic corridor. In short, seven transit districts don't serve the needs of the public in SWCT and seven transit districts result in overlapping bureaucratic waste of taxpayer dollars. Simply put, if you were to start from scratch you would never do it this way.

Attached is a map I created where I attempt to illustrate the approximate locations of the various transit districts. In SWCT it is stunning to see a map that clearly shows how transit historically has been designed to separate towns. Some would say that the Coastal Link bus is the seamless connection for SWCT, but in truth riders are forced to deal with five separate segments, websites, and mobile apps across this small area. Just imagine trying to take the I95 or the Metro North and switching five times in under 50 miles.

Nearly every goal for future economic growth, sustainability, health and well-being of residents, employees and business is directly connected to CT's ability to operate a coherent public transportation system in efficient and effective manner. To that end, we can't: 1) speed up Metro North unless we provide efficient alternative town to town travel; 2) attract jobs and a broad age demographic if we can't provide alternative modes of transportation; 3) address affordable housing needs if residents are shut out of efficient transit access; and 4) improve air quality if we don't evolve to truly incorporate multiple options for transportation.

I urge our state leaders to follow the lead of other states by creating more unified transit operations across the state. This is not a new issue. Transit operations have already been the topic of multiple studies costing tax-payers millions of dollars with countless recommendations. In truth, on this subject, we don't need another study as much as we need legislation and regulations that enable the consolidation of transit districts and operations into a more efficient and effective system. The sooner the better.

Thank you again.



The Coastal Link Bus Service:

- Connecting 47 miles of CT's coast along RT 1 between Greenwich and New Haven
- Divided into five bus line segments (shown below in purple, green, yellow, orange & blue)
- Service through Westport (in yellow) is shared by three different transit operators: Norwalk Transit, Greater Bridgeport Transit & Milford Transit

